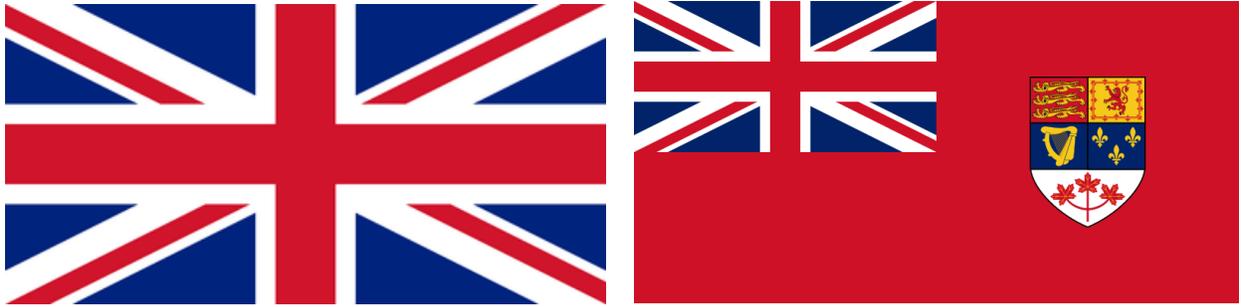


The Silent Sentinels of “Depot”



When members gather together, the topic of discussion usually turns to their time in training. Areas of discussion, again depending when you were at “Depot”, can range from the Riding School, the Drill Hall (everyone’s favourite), or the dreaded pool or gym. Of course, there was fumbling through typing classes...remember typewriters?



Not many talk of the “Silent Sentinels of “Depot”. The flagpoles.

Recently, while chatting with a group of veterans one told of the time, he had to lower the flag at the end of the day. It did not go well. It was one of those particularly windy Saskatchewan days and while trying to lower the flag it became tangled in the halyards as the flag was being lowered. (“Depot” still uses naval terminology in describing the flag pole. I am sure this brings much consternation to those that say RCMP training is still too para-military). Being unsuccessful in his attempts to untangle the flag he had to report his lack of success to the Duty NCO in the Guardroom. The Duty NCO provided some verbal guidance in a not so subtle manner to get his posterior back out there and get the “damn flag down”. He followed his orders. The flag came down.

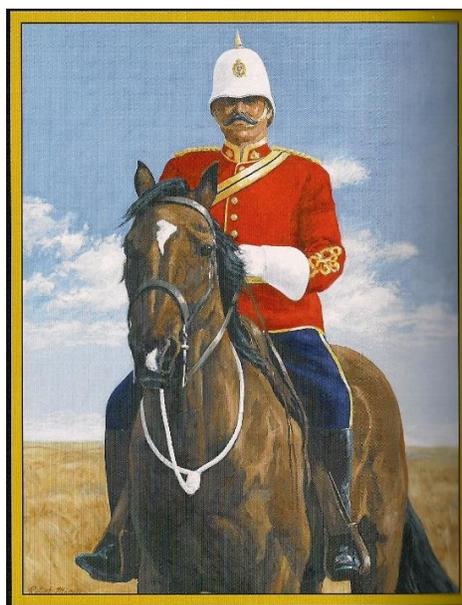
The veterans then discussed the flagpole. Is it the original “Depot” flagpole? How many have there been? I had no answer to the question. Another investigation to be done.

I am sure that buried in the archived files of the Force there is an answer to the question. But not having access to those files, I have relied on historical photos of “Depot” and what was referred to in the early days as the “Barrack Square”.

As we all know the HQs of the Force of the NWMP changed many times as the Force moved across the North West Territories (MB, SK & AB).

In 1882 a decision was made by Lt. Governor Edgar Dewdney of the North-West Territories to move the NWMP HQs from Fort Walsh to a point on the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway called “Pile of Bones”. On September 13, Inspector Sam Steele was sent to Regina to arrange the creation of the new HQs.

In 1915 Colonel S.B. Steele, C.B., M.V.O., wrote his book “*Forty Years in Canada – Reminiscences of the Great North-West*”. In it he details the choice of “Pile of Bones” as the site of the new NWMP HQs.



“At Regina the new capital frame houses were already taking the place of canvas tents. When we arrived there, we encamped on the homestead of Mr. George Moffat, on which it was afterwards decided that the headquarters of the N.W.M.P. were to be and are still. None of the officers liked the site. I suggested another to the comptroller and drove him over to inspect it, but it was a good thing for Saskatchewan and the city that it was not chosen, for it is now occupied by the imposing public buildings of that province, and has the pretty artificial lake where I thought we could have a dam for the water supply, there being nothing but the creek, then known as “The Pile of Bones,” to depend upon for the coming winter. The Lieutenant Governor had made up his mind, however, and he decided upon the present location, for which the good citizens of Regina owe him thanks, as well as for the place being chosen as the capital.”

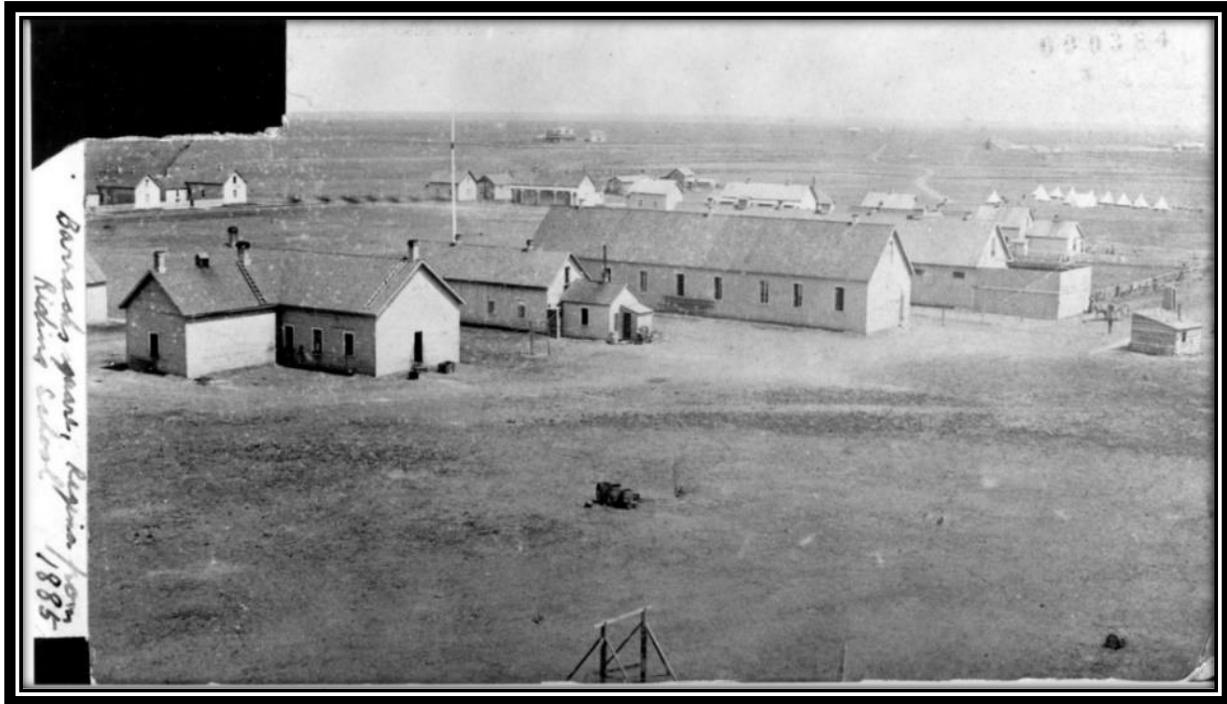


1885 – no flag pole

Insp. Steele received forty pre-fabricated building in 1882 from the east to form the new HQs. Unable to locate any photos of the new HQs at Regina in 1882 the earliest I could find was the photo above taken in 1885. Note that there is no flag pole in what would be called the “Barracks Square” for many years.

The story of how “Depot” Division came to be is well known to all members. Commissioner Irvine upon visiting the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1880 returned to Canada and recommended a “Depot of Instruction” be created. Not until after the rebellion of 1885 and a surge in the number of NWMP members did “Depot”, on November 1st, 1885, come into being. “Depot” to this day is the longest serving division of the Force. It is the only division to have had two Commissioners (Irvine and Herchmer) as its Commanding Officer.

The picture below, also taken in 1885, may well be one of the first taken of “Depot”. There is now a flag pole situated in the “Barracks Square”.



Sam Steele also adds to the “Pile of Bones” creek name: *“We often had visitors during the autumn. Many would say, “What a pity the creek is called ‘Pile of Bones’, not a pretty name, is it?” To this remark, I always replied, ‘Wascana’ is the Sioux name for Pile of Bones, it means the same thing. Of the correctness of the translation I was satisfied, and as Major Walsh had given the Sioux names of Wapella and Sintaluta to stations further east, I thought it would be a good thing to give one to ‘Pile of Bones’, and it is thus that it became Wascana.”*



A colourized version of an old B&W photo of Wascana, aka 'Pile of Bones', Creek. In the background the Riding School is on the left, water tower in the center and the Commissioner's residence on the right. For those of certain vintage, note there are no fedoras floating in the creek.

On a personal note, when I was a Drill Instructor at "Depot", oh so many years ago, occasionally on one of those rare Regina days when it was not too hot, not too cold, I would take one of my senior troops for a march through one of the neighbourhoods near the grounds of "Depot". This was much to the delight of the neighbourhood kids and their moms...a break in their day. Heading back to "Depot" down 11th Ave. we would stop at a little green space at the small bridge that crossed Wascana Creek (the last stretch of 11th Ave. leading to the "Depot" grounds is now named for Cst. George Knox Garrett, Reg # 852, **Honour Roll # 7**). I tried to instill the historical significance of the moment. It probably fell on deaf ears as they were more worried about their sore feet or being late for their next class. I wonder how many recruits raced across that bridge over the years in an effort not to be late getting back from their pass?



“Good news, no Drill Class today. You are going for a neighbourhood patrol and a history lesson!”

I have no documented proof to substantiate if the original “Depot” flag pole was eventually replaced by a sturdier version. But in the 1911 photograph below it appears that a much larger flag pole is in place with a “yard arm”. The barracks square is fenced in and landscaped. It seems painted white rocks were always a cheap way of marking boundaries around “Depot” and other NWMP-RNWMP posts. No doubt the landscaping and painting was done by recruits.



1911



1919



1920



**Date unknown, but the Barrack Square has a completely different appearance.
A tennis court? I wonder whose idea that was?**



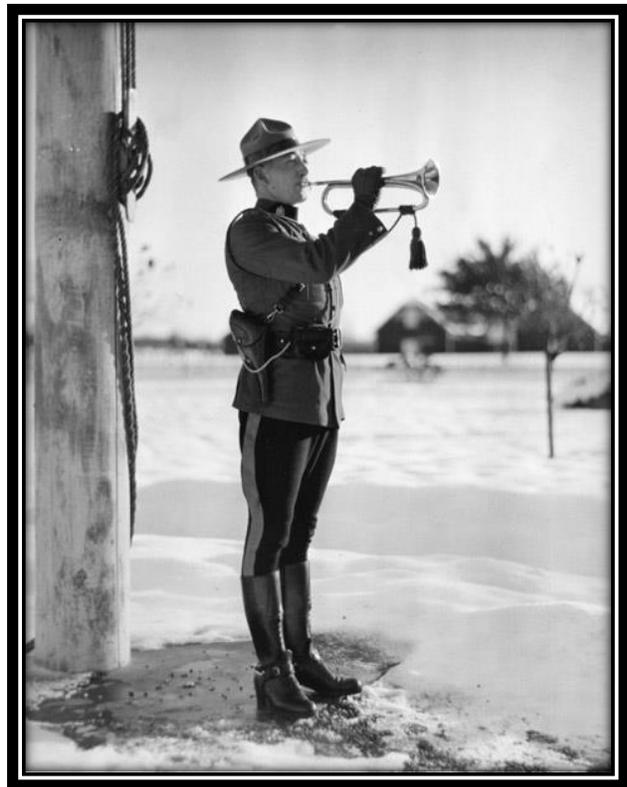
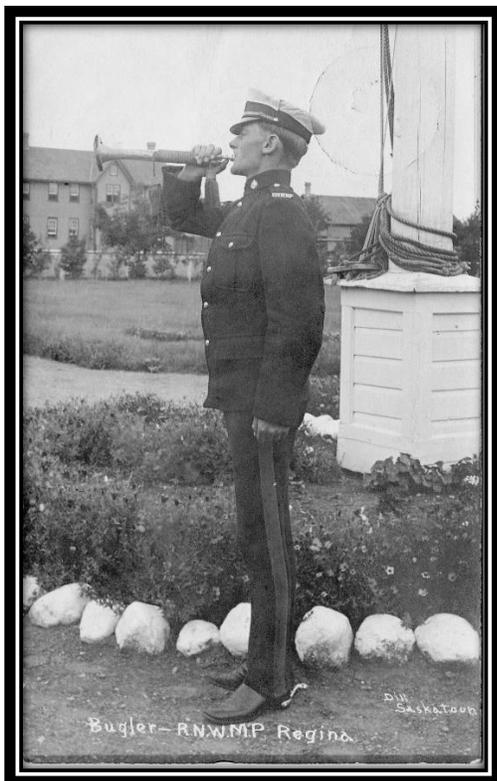
**The above photo is dated 1939 – this may have been a performance for
King George VI and Queen Elizabeth’s visit to “Depot”.**

Truth or Urban Legend?

The “Keewatin” purchased in July 1890 was the first vessel chartered by the NWMP for patrol duties on Lake Winnipeg. It’s career with the NWMP was short lived as it sunk on September 8th, 1890. As a result, two members perished. There has been talk for years that the “Depot” flagpole had been salvaged from the sunken “Keewatin” or was a duplicate. Unfortunately, upon checking Kenneth John Haycock’s (Reg # 42712) book “*The History of RCMP Marine Services*” there is no photo of the “Keewatin”, but she is described as a “small sailing vessel”. So, it seems unlikely that the large flagpole of “Depot” is modeled after, or came from, the wrecked “Keewatin”. I stand to be corrected on this assumption if anyone has more information at their disposal.

In their book “Behind the Badge – History of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police “Depot” Division”, Dale Sheehan and Redd Oosten, note in a time line of building construction at “Depot”: “Flagpole - Erected by “P” Squad on Sleigh Square at “Depot” September 14, 1943.” I am unable to locate any photographs of the new flagpole being put in place.

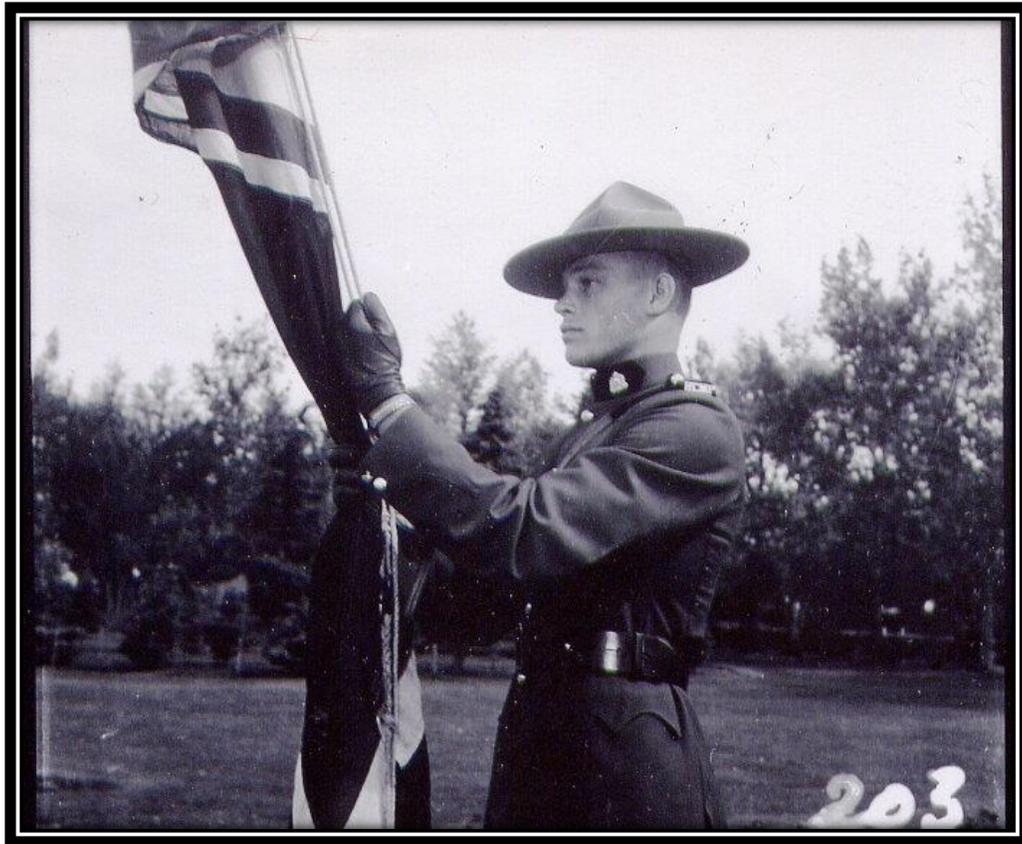
While making enquiries about the history of the flagpoles I was also told that the flagpole was again replaced in the late 1980s or early 1990s. Again, I can find no photographic evidence of this taking place.



Interesting- same flagpole with a decorative base added or removed?



Hoping that the flag does not become tangled!



Success!



An early “Mountie” postcard – an unceremonious lowering of the flag.



Duty done!

At “Depot” on a very cold and snowy February 15, 1965 members and staff paraded in pea jackets and fur caps as the Canadian Red Ensign was lowered for the last time.

A Force legend, but I have it on good authority, Assistant Commissioner Pearlson, the C.O. of “F” Division, did not leave his office, which was in the corner of “A” Block, when the new flag was raised. He apparently turned his back to the window overlooking the parade square and flag pole when the Maple Leaf flag was raised for the first time at “Depot”. He, as were many others of the

day, was a staunch supporter of the old Canadian Red Ensign and did not approve of the “new” Canadian Maple Leaf flag.



The Silent Sentinel has your six!



The changing face of the Barrack Square



1920s



1977





Present Day



Sergeant Major's Parade

Imagine if the Silent Sentinels of “Depot” Division could tell us what they have witnessed over the years. The formation of the NWMP transitioning through to the RNWMP and the RCMP. The creation of the RCMPs first centralized HQs, and the long lasting “Depot of Instruction”. Preparations by mounted contingents for Queen Victoria Golden Jubilee, introducing the NWMP to the world and mounted contingents for coronations. The Cavalry Draft of World War I and the return of those members living in tents around the “Depot” grounds. The presentation of the new Guidon by Queen Elizabeth II in 1973, the hundredth anniversary of the Force. And so many other events.

And what of the men and women, the members of the Force, who trained and worked at “Depot”? As of September 2020, Regimental numbers have been issued up to **66800**. Not all of those **66800** have trained at “Depot”. There were those that joined the NWMP prior to 1885 and the formation of “Depot” and those who trained at “N” Division. Each one upon arriving at “Depot” and walking or marching past the Silent Sentinels had their own history and story, but they all had a similar goal, to complete training. Upon leaving “Depot” after training each new member’s career path took their individual twists and turn.

These are just a few of the millions of memories that are stored away in the non-existent memory banks of the of the Silent Sentinels of “Depot”.



The sun sets at “Depot”. Another day done.

**Ric Hall 24394/O.1330
2020-09-21**

